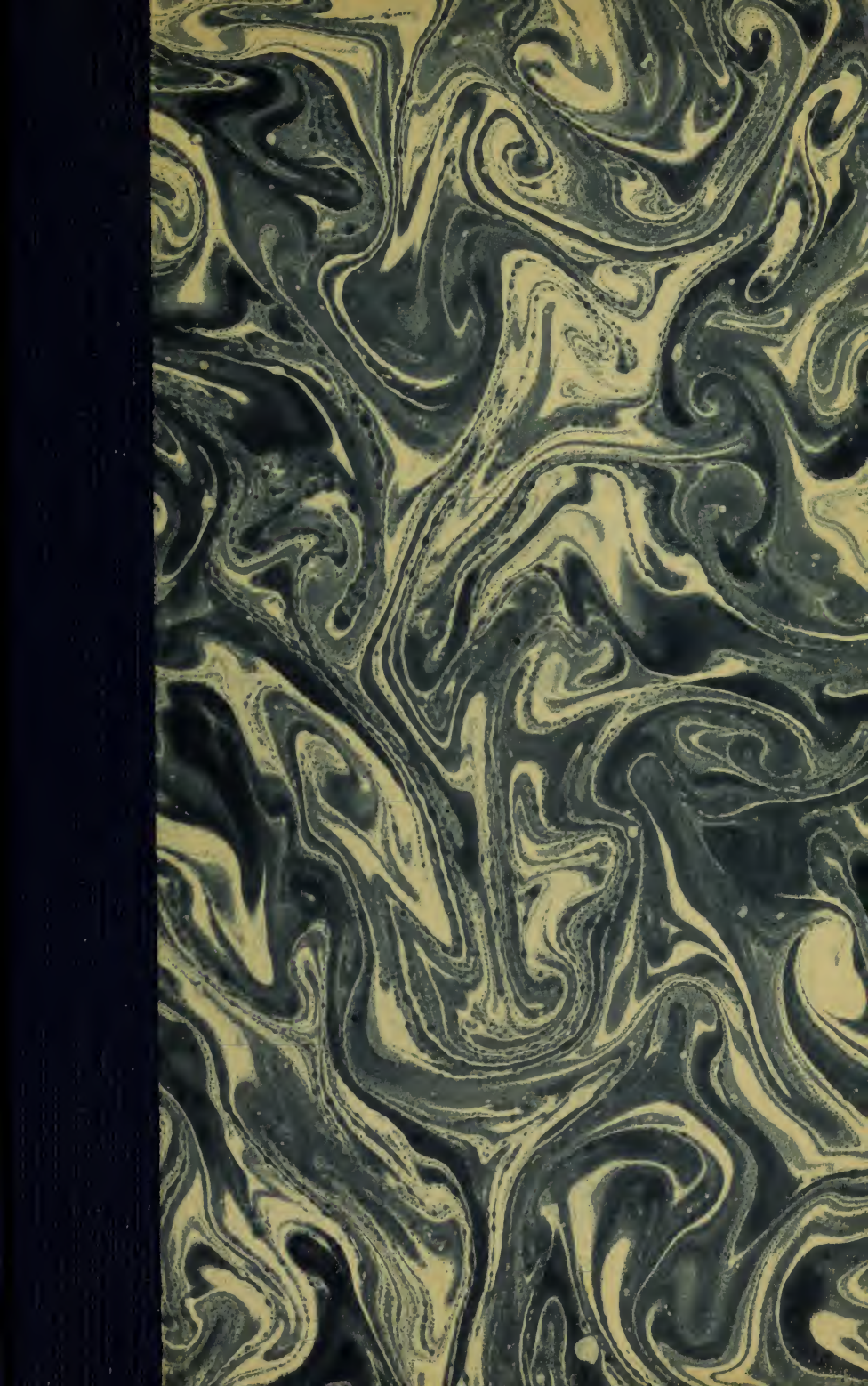

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THE MAPLE LEAF

AS AN

EMBLEM OF CANADA.

PAPER READ BEFORE THE

PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY OF YORK,

July 7, 1891,

BY

HENRY SCADDING, D.D.,

President of the Society.

TORONTO:
PATRICK BOYLE, PRINTER.
1891.

THE MAPLE LEAF

AS AN

EMBLEM OF CANADA,

The beautifully shaped leaf of the sugar maple (*acer saccharinum*) has become of late years the received emblem of the whole Dominion of Canada. It is to be seen on our coinage; on our copper coin in a conventional form, and on the silver pieces arranged in a natural wreath. It will be of some interest to consider the circumstances that may have led to the adoption of this symbol.

Selections from the leaves of the forest and flowers of the field, as emblems of States and countries, are alwas pleasing to the eye, and are ofentimes quite important, as inspiring sentiments of patriotism, to say nothing of their great utility occasionally in rhetoric and poetry. It was quite a stroke of policy on the part of the people of the United States to choose for their country within the past twelve months an emblem from the floral world, although its application is not so self-evident as it might be. The flower selected is said to have been the golden rod; in allusion possibly to the wealth so readily to be acquired throughout the whole Union by the exercise of energy, shrewdness and thrift. Already several of the States had their sylvan emblems Connecticut, for example, has on its seal or shield of arms the grape vine loaded with rich clusters; Maine shows the pine or spruce; Vermont displays the same symbol; South Carolina has the palmetto.

Our grand Canadian sugar maple leaf resembles in some degree the leaf of the mulberry tree in form, and by an association of ideas it will remind some readers of the curious fact long ago noticed, that the famous Peloponesus bore in its outline a likeness to this leaf, whence the modern name of that part of Greece is derived—Morea, denoting the leaf of the morus, or mulberry. The Peloponesus was also likened in shape to the leaf of the *platenus* or Plane-tree, the Canadian Button-wood.

It is certain that the production of sugar from the sap of the maple tree was known to the Indians of this country before the

arrival of Europeans among them Father Lafitau, in his "Manners and Customs of the Indians," vol. 1, page 343, gives a full page engraving showing the Indians busily engaged in its manufacture. Joutel, a companion of La Salle, in one of his letters, speaks of the maple sugar as of a kind of manna provided for sojourners in the wilderness. "We had not much meat," he says, "but Providence furnished us a kind of manna to add to our Indian corn, which manna was of a juice which the trees eject in this season, and notably the maples, of which there are many in this province, and which are very large;" and Captain Bossu, who travelled in Louisiana in 1770, refers to the use of the maple sugar among the native Indians. His words are: "They brought me a calabash, full of the vegetable juice of the maple. The Indians," he proceeds to say, "extract it in January, making a hole at the base of the tree, and apply a little tube to that. At the first thaw they get a little barrel full of the juice, which they boil to a syrup, and being boiled over again it changes to a reddish sugar, looking like Calabrian manna. The apothecaries justly prefer it to the sugar which is made of the sugar cane." "The French," Bossu adds, "who are settled at the Illinois have learnt from the Indians to make the syrup, which is an exceedingly good remedy for coughs and rheumatism." The Indians are even said to have called one of the early moons or months of the year "the sugar moon"

The use of the sugar thus manufactured entered largely into the domestic economy of the early French habitans, who considered it almost an article of food. The French, while learning from the native Indians the manufacture of sugar from maple sap, would probably thus learn likewise to give special honour to the source of a commodity so pleasant and useful, and at length make choice of a spray of maple leaves to be an emblem of their nationality. Hence on the monument of Ludger Duverney, in the Cote des Neiges cemetery at Montreal, founder of the Jean Baptiste Society of Lower Canada, is sculptured a wreath of maple leaves. This Jean Baptiste Society was instituted in 1834 for the purpose of stimulating and maintaining a spirit of nationality among the French inhabitants of the country as opposed to the strongly felt English influence. The Jean Baptiste Society and its wreath of maple leaves during the troubles of 1837 were held to be the exponents of a somewhat anti-British sentiment, and the modern Jean Baptiste Society is understood to maintain its old attitude in this respect as regards the French inhabitants of the Lower Province.

On the restoration of peace and quietness after the troubles of 1837, it would seem that literary men in Upper Canada, accustomed to allude constantly to the beautiful, well-known emblems

of England, Ireland, Scotland and France, the rose, the shamrock, the thistle and white lily, were led to look about for a fitting emblem of Canada likewise; and observing the employment of the maple leaf as a symbol of a part of the country, were induced to adopt that leaf as a symbol of the whole of it. The idea prevailed and was very generally adopted. It was like capturing a gun from the enemy, and then turning it upon the enemy; for it now represented the loyal and patriotic feeling of all the English-speakin5 population. It may not be generallg known that *erable*, the French for *Maple*, is a barbarous transformation of the Latin *acer arbor*, maple tree, by the intrusion of an *l*, at least so says Scheler in his Etymological French Dictionary.

One of the earliest occasions of a literary use being made of the maple leaf as a Canadian emblem was the application of the title "Maple Leaf" to a handsome series of quarto volumes published at Toronto in 1847-48-49 by Mr. Henry Rowsell, and edited by Rev. Dr. McCaul. In the preface to the first volume of this work, the editor uses the following graceful language: "When we formed the idea of offering to Canada a literary wreath, we determined that the only hands which should weave the garland should be those of her children by birth or by adoption, and that no flowers, however lovely, should be twined with the maple leaf but those that had blossomed amidst her forests." And at the beginning of the third volume of the same work we have an allusion in verse to the newly adopted emblem as follows:

> "Hurrah for the leaf—the Maple leaf;
> Up, Forresters, heart and hand;
> High in Heaven's free air waves your emblem fair—
> The pride of the forest land."

The emblem appears to have soon successfully established itself, as may be seen from numerous patriotic effusions in verse bearing date from '49 downwards. On each side of the handsomely bound Toronto publication was stamped in gold a large leaf of the sugar maple, bearing on it the title "Canadian Annual." In 1867 appeared at Quebec a compilation of legendary and other matter by Mr. Lemoine, entitled "Maple Leaves"—a name evidently borrowed from the Toronto publication.

In connection with the mention we have made of the St. Jean Baptiste Society, it may be added that St. John the Baptist was selected, it is said, a patron of French Canada, in a great measure on account of his being a preacher in the wilderness, and clothed in skins, albeit not of the beaver, another very generally reeeived emblem of Canada. Is it not possible that the wild honey (the Mel sylvestre of the old Latin Bibles) which was a portion of the

food of John the Baptist in the wilderness, may have helped to the adoption of the leaf of the sugar maple as an emblem of Canada?

It was a happy thought on the part of the authorities of the Herald office of Great Britain to emblazon maple leaves on the shields of arms of both the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada alike, that is to say of the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec alike, when the elaborate arms for the whole Dominion were officially constructed.